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TENTATIVE TITLE: LIFE AFTER THE RADCLIFFE LINE: A STUDY OF SELECT AUTONARRATIVES BY BENGALI DALITS

INTRODUCTION:

The present research intends to study the autobiographies of the Bengali Dalit writers in India, who also happen to be the victims of partition of India, with a view to analyse the nature of oppression, socioeconomic inequality, exploitation, resistance and suffering. It will also focus on the ideology of dominant social class, caste and race of Dalits mediated in the autobiographies resulting into diverse forms of oppressions of Dalits in India. Dalits have been harassed by the dominant class and castes and have suffered from racial discrimination in India. The forms of harassment and marginalization are diverse in nature. The socio-cultural and economic interests created a nexus between the deprived, marginalized communities and the mainstream society

THEME:

Partition leads to devastating effects on human society. It disturbs, disrupts and destroys the age-old bonds of the affected people with their surroundings, culture, kith and kin, with which they have lived a peaceful, harmonious and beautiful life. But the evil design and the ambition of certain groups of power-mongers are imposed on the innocent victims of partition, leading to migration, displacement and socio-political, cultural and psychological trauma. Everybody, without exception, suffers unwillingly when borders are created and people are divided. But, the underdogs of the society, women, children and the so-called Dalits, suffer a lot as the discrimination against them does not end even after the lucrative promises of the partition. Among the victims of the partition, the Dalits suffer the worst because the rehabilitation programme, humanitarian aid and the promised settlements do not reach them or reach them late, if at all they are given.

All the above are very much true in the context of Dalit victims of the partition of Bengal which was brought into being by the (in)famous Radcliffe Line drawn on 17th August,1947, two days after India's Independence. The world has read, heard and seen the grievances of the privileged upper-caste victims of the partition and tried to provide some solace only to very small extent. But the inhuman plight of the Dalit's migration took about decades to surface. Thanks to the Dalit movement and Dalit literature in the other parts of the country which gave confidence to the Bangla Dalit victims of partition, to educate themselves in order to speak and write about their hidden apartheid in the caste-ridden society and culture in India.

Hence, the Dalit autobiographies entitled *Surviving in My World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal* by Manohar Mouli Biswas, *Interrogating My Chandal Life* by Manoranjan Byapari, *Memories of Arrival: A Voice of the Margins* by Adhir Biswas, *Shikor Chhera Jibon:Udbastu Jiboner Dolil* by Jatin Bala, *Ek Rikshawalar Atmakotha* by Raju Das, *Langol Kalam* by Nirmal Gayenand *Ami Keno Charal Likhi* by Kalyani Thakur Charal have been selected to study as primary texts for this project. Among the seven mentioned autonarratives, the first three have already been translated in English while the latter four will be translated by the researcher herself.

IMPORTANCE OF THE THEME AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The Radcliffe Line – a geographical marker that demarcated the boundary between India and newly-created dominion of Pakistan, was published cartographically, cleaving the subcontinent barely two days after the country's Independence from the British rule. The line was drawn by British lawyer Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who performed the job during his maiden visit to colonial India, just before Independence. The Partition further led to chaos, sectarian violence and large-scale human migrations, unprecedented in the modern history. On both sides of the boundary he had drawn, altering the geographical spans and the fate of large provinces of Punjab and Bengal, that had a far-reaching ramification. And, it wasn't just a territorial division. The Partition not only led to division of railways, institutions but also division of families and hearts. It also witnessed the violence that took place on both sides of India and both sides of the newly-drawn border. Horrifying images of trains arriving at border stations laden with bodies of people killed in violence and a massive number of people marching in foot columns, leaving their homes and heart behind, many starving and struggling on the way to what had become their "new homeland", still send chills down the spine of the death and sufferings that humanity endured. The human tragedy and the mayhem that unfolded was so frightening. While West Punjab became part of West Pakistan, East Punjab was given to India, and Bengal's division saw a large swathe of its eastern territory forming part of East Pakistan.

Poet W H Auden in 1966 wrote a poem titled *Partition* is seen as a criticism of the job Radcliffe was entrusted with by the British shortly before they granted Independence to India."Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission;/ Having never set eyes on this land, he was called to partition./ Between two peoples fanatically at odds;/ With their different diets and incompatible gods," reads the opening lines of the poem. Radcliffe headed the joint commission that was set up to recommend how the Punjab and Bengal regions of the Indian subcontinent were to be divided between India and Muslim-majority Pakistan shortly before India's Independence. The Commission, appointed by Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of British India, consisted of four members from the Indian National Congress and four from the Muslim League and was chaired by Radcliffe. The Commission's mandate was to draw boundaries in the two regions, based on populations of Hindus and Muslims among other factors and sought to keep intact those populations within Indian and Pakistani territory respectively.

The division of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 on the basisof the "Two-nation-Theory" gave birth to two nations— India and Pakistan respectively. The emergence of these two nations at the end of colonial rule, celebrated as the crowning achievement of the Freedom Movement, was nevertheless accompanied by horrendous tragic events because of the unplanned way the leaders proceeded to partition the country. It is now very difficult to imagine the impact of the tragedy on human life. Politically, the country was divided; socially communal relationships were disturbed; domestically families underwent traumas; psychologically individuals were torn apart and lost their identity. Now the Partition is a fait accompli; what was done cannot be undone. We cannot afford to be amnesiac about that bloody chapter of history. What is important is the world has to learn from the effects of the event.

Now it seems that there is a need to understand the complexity of the partition, as many of the contemporary problems have their roots in the rumblings of partition. The communal politics,

which guided the road to partition, has been not only a present-day problem before India but also a global worry. Communal riots, refugee problem along with caste discrimination have been disturbing Indian social, political and economic stability time and again. The religion-based division of the country anticipated many of the questions that trouble us now across the subcontinent: ethnicity, communalism, the rise of religious fundamentalism and cultural nationalism. Sharply but poignantly, partition posed the question of identity in a way that polarized choice and allegiance among the refugees, aggravating the old and new antagonisms.

Hence, partition has not remained a one-time event of history. It is not something that can be ignored. It has to occupy a significant place in the social, cultural, political and historical discourse of our country because it functions as a touchstone of our culture and polity. Therefore, studies related to the partition are very relevant. The destructive legacies and nightmarish memories of Partition still guide the public policy and inhabit the progress from a colonial state to post-colonial democracies. Yet partition and its known and unknown legacies have played and continue to play, important roles in the construction of collective identity and thinking in modern India. Therefore, it is evident that discussions on the partition, which generally address communal fanaticism, refugee problem, colonial chicanery, results of unplanned decisions, futility of violence, loss of human life, caste politics, contest over power sharing etc., may help us to solve some of the contemporary problems and pave the way for a better future.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS:

The present research proposes to find out solutions of the following problems-

1. How deep was the impact of the (in)famous Radcliffe Line

2. How their human identity was rejected by the so-called ambitious upper-caste group of people

3. How Dalit aesthetics is unique and different than the mainstream aesthetics

4. How Bengali Dalit writers spread the message of Dalit liberty and fraternity through their autonarratives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

Caste as an analytical category is seldom introduced into the discussion of the Partition of India in 1947. In conventional narratives of partition, the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress are presented as the two main players and the partition-related violence is assumed to be primarily between the Hindus and the Sikhs on one side and the Muslims on the other. All internal differentiations within these groups, based on gender, caste or religion, are collapsed to present the two contending groups as homogenous categories, two distinct social and political identities.

It is interesting that Dalit writing in Bengal, the state, known to have brought forth many reformative movements involving women, like widow marriage and abolishing ‘Sati’, was late in giving voice to its Dalit writers, majority of whom are also victims of partition.

The Renaissance and the humanistic impulse that reached the shores of India with the advent of the British rule, influenced Bengali writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra

Chattopadhyay, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay, Shankar, Sunil Gangopadhayay and more recently Mahasweta Devi and Amitav Ghosh. These writers included the plight of the marginalised in their works and addressed issues that were never raised before. But these were not writings that emerged out of experience of an empty gut and the blood and sweat of generations forming a collective memory of the oppressed. The reformist 'Brahmo Samaj' was joined by the elite and well to do ('bhadralok') Bengalis and while they looked into the plight of the women, there is no record of any Dalit woman ever becoming a Brahmo. Dalit existence remained largely unrecognised in Bengal, so much so that when the Dalit movement started in here, it was difficult for the Bengalis to acknowledge their presence in the society. But a language that was strewn with class differences, there had to be a group of people with a strong voice of remonstration to bring it up and fight for their right.

Dalit literature fights for purgation of defiled social system. It is a living, breathing literary movement that is intent on establishing itself as an integral part of the field of Indian literature. Dalit literature protests against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or occupation. It has not been recognized as a literature till 1970 but now its name is being heard all around the world. It has made the people to think against the exploitation and suppression. The rise of this literature marks a new chapter for India's marginalised class. Umpteen magazines, literary forums and workshops about Dalit came into existence because of this literature. Many well-known Dalit writers are emerged from villages and towns. The poets, short story writers, novelists, autobiographers are receiving both exposure and opportunity in the marketplace that they have never before received. This research basically tries to focus on how the Bengali Dalit autobiographies fight for purgation of defiled social system. To unfold the major and even minor complexities faced by them, Dalit literature came into existence. The studies are now firmly established as an important and indispensable aspect of all attempts to understand and analyse the complexities of Indian society.

It is quite unfortunate that even though so much have been written by the Marathi Dalit writers, which has not been translated into English or Hindi yet, keeping their life memoirs away from the world. Talking about women autobiographies, only a few can be assessed because of the language problem. Some of the women wrote critically about violence in Dalit families. Apart from writing literary pieces, some of them like Urmila Pawar and others also tried to unearth various misconception attributed to Dalit women by the so-called mainstream social scientists through micro and macro research projects. The life accounts of these women are not just tales of sorrows but of courage. They all fight against all the odds and finally get themselves established as writers.

Dalit women from all over India have now started to reveal their inner turmoil without any fear. Their condition has become the main concern for many of the feminist writers like Sharmila Rege who have pointed out the internal contradiction that exists in Dalit women's movement citing the difference between rural and urban, illiterate and literate, poor and rich Dalit women. However, it doesn't mean that the Dalit movement launched by women is a complete failure though it is true that it is still in its inception and yet to achieve its objectives, but the literary expression coming from these women suggest that Dalit women in India are sure to get their due in the coming days.

Even the most progressive and revolutionary minded writers like Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand,T.S. Pillai, V.S. Khandekar and several others who have tried to describe the sentiments

of Dalits are not being accepted. According to Dalit writers only a Dalit by birth can have the sensitivity and experience to be a genuine Dalit writer. Their writings are believed to be the letters of their own blood, a natural outburst of the feelings and thoughts which have been blocked up for centuries. Unlike the non-Dalit writers, the Dalit writers attempt to be true to their lived experiences and feel that their vision and response must be translated into art honestly, in its raw form, without euphemism. Their vehicle is often the brutal, coarse and crude language of slum, springing from a life of poverty, ignorance and violence. There is even an attempt on their part to evolve a new aesthetics because they feel that the genteel expectation of the existing elite literary standard cannot do justice to the equality of the life they know and render in writing. Thus, Dalit literature aims at creating a counter-culture and a separate identity for the Dalits in the society.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are as follows:

• The impact of the Radcliff Line on the Bengali Dalits.

•To study how Bengali Dalits' human identity was rejected in the course of time through historical and literary points of views.

• To explore how different non-Brahmin movements have tried to establish socio-culturalidentity of Bengali Dalits.

• To study how Bengali Dalits' political empowerment has helped them to present themselves in literary scenario for their quest of identity in literature and society.

• To explore how Dalit writers are different and authentic in the presentation of Dalit life than

the non-Dalit upper caste writers.

• To present how Dalit aesthetics is unique and different than the mainstream aesthetics.

•To present Dalit literature and culture and to shun the blind-faith, superstition, unscientific and inhuman social inequality and spread the message of Dalit liberty and fraternity through literature.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

Autobiographies, in traditional Indian literary genre, were not very common way of expressing emotions as poetry was but from the 19th century onwards some revolutionary people showed the courage to narrate their personal lives. Though the critical studies of these kinds of personal narratives has been a slow process in India. Dalits who have been raising their voices for quite some time, through their personal narratives, were constantly ignored and neglected in the academic centered. Raj Kumar in his *Dalit Personal Narratives* writes that one possible reason for this neglect could be that these voices challenge the hegemony of the upper caste and make way for assertation of the marginal self.

Indian literature is being turned upside down with the subaltern speaking and it is vital to capture this phenomenon via English translation. The importance of Dalit refugee narratives in partition literature is usually dominated by tropes of educated, high caste refugees who manage to rise in every way in the post partition era. In translating Adhir Biswas's books, Ramaswamy talked of how he wanted to address and redress the unbridgeable division of class and caste experiences. Therefore, one needs to be familiar with Bengali culture and history to some

extent to understand the texts. Retaining the voice and the style of the original while making it comprehensible for the non-embedded reader, had been a challenge for the translators of these autonarratives.

One striking feature of such autobiographical writings is, they are vehemently social critique of the 'Varna' system which declared Dalits as the most inferior and untouchable part of Hindu society. In this struggle, critical to remove an evil which is admittedly blot on humanity, autobiographies serve as moral source for Dalit movement. They split open the pain and sufferings suffered by Dalits under the rigidity of tradition. All such autobiography writers are living in cities and mostly they revisit their villages in autobiographies. Their entire life-narrative gains a representative quality and imparts the true feeling of the sting they have suffered. The protagonist of the autobiography is, of course, the writer himself, but his personal experiences, instead of being unique and individualist, encompasses the general condition of the whole Dalit community. They are called by their caste names like 'Bhangi', 'Chamar', 'Bagdi', 'Dolui' etc. and in essence, these names stand for their state of untouchability.

Though not all but few autobiographies have touched upon the issue of women among Dalits. They are unequal partners and are further down the ladder of caste and sub-caste. They bear the burden of patriarchy as well as low caste. Aesthetics have also been debated among Dalit writers and demanded different parameters of aesthetics to judge the Dalit writings. Their argument is that since Dalits do not have access to education and high literature, so unlike upper-caste writers, they portray reality which torments them and live like a beastly creature. These autobiographies are replete with filthy abuses because the writers have been abused several times over for intimidation. They cannot write poetically about the beauty of nature and neither can they depict stories of romantic love in their writings because the basic struggle of survival and dignity are foremost for them.

Hypothesis

Bengali Dalit autonarratives automatically document that the Bengali Dalit victims after the partition along the Radcliffe Line are double victims-victims of partition and victims of caste. Bengali Dalit writers like Manohar Mouli Biswas, Manoranjan Byapari, Jatin Bala, Adhir Biswas, Raju das, Kalyani Thakur Charal and Nirmal Gayen expose through their auto narratives, the capacity of isolation, subjugation and denial played against them by the treacherous leaders who imposed partition on them and pushed them to the point of no return and their identity as a 'nowhere man', continues even today. But, the tearful eyes of the survivours speak volumes about the pogrom, with muted sighs. Hence, the hypothesis is that-

1)Bengali Dalit autobiography explores humiliations and sufferings faced by downtrodden.

2) It represents the problems and issues of their world which aggravated by the (in)famous Radcliff Line due to partition of India.

3) Bengali Dalit autobiography identifies diverse forms of manipulation on downtrodden people.

4) Bengali Dalit autobiography's language is revolt but of a deeply introspective towards his emotional world.

5) Black and Current Dalit autobiographies not only explore the oppression but also the optimism for the emancipation.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

This study focuses primarily only on seven Bengali Dalit writer's autobiographies: namely Bengali Dalit writers like Manohar Mouli Biswas, Manoranjan Byapari, Jatin Bala, Adhir Biswas, Raju das, Kalyani Thakur Charal and Nirmal Gayen who represent the impact of the Bengali Dalits in the Partition in 1947 on Bengal and East Pakistan as victims and their trauma, loss of identity, unprecedented struggle for citizenship, recognition and so on as primary sources for analysis. No other Dalit writer from Bengal or anywhere else shall be studied as the primary source. However, other Dalit writers' writings and autobiographies may be used for reference as secondary sources in this study.

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY:

Every research requires a well-defined and suitable methodology in order to get a more positive and substantial result. Therefore, the researcher will use primary and secondary data to analyse and get the conclusions. The data will be analysed, studied and organized coherently in a logical sequence using the descriptive and exploratory methods, library research and interviews. Since the research project is of complex nature, the researcher will also use the analytical method. The secondary data will help the researcher to arrive at the inferences and conclusions. There will be a combination of various research methods adopted in the course of the study like historical, descriptive, exploratory and comparative methods.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The search for the related literature will serve several important purposes. It can be said that the review of related literature will be a scanning of the writings of the recognised authorities which will provide evidence that the researcher is familiar with what is done and what is still unknown. Since effective research is based upon past knowledge, this step will help to eliminate the duplication of what has been done and will provide useful hypotheses and helpful suggestions for significant investigation. So, the purpose of this review is to analyse critically a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification and comparison of prior research studies, review of literature and theoretical articles.

Interrogating My Chandal Life, (2018) by Manoranjan Byapari is by far the first well-knit Bengali Dalit autobiography in recent times. It portrays the journey of a poor, wretched, caste-ridden soul through surrounding socio-political upheavals. Caste as well as poverty became the prime movers in deciding his tragic fate. He came from Barishal, present Bangladesh to West Bengal at the age of three. He was in Bankura Shiromanipur Refugee Camp for nearly seven years. Suddenly one day, the dole given by the government to the refugee camp was stopped and the family had to move out to the Ghutiyari Sharif, Gholadoltala Refugee Camp, South 24 Paraganas in present Kolkata.

ItibritteChandal Jiban, translated by Sipra Mukherjee as *Interrogating My Chandal Life* (2018), is a testament of a Dalit life by Monoranjan Byapari. In his own words, it is a naked,

unornamented truth of life which had supplied resources for his writings. Apprehending the customary apprehensions, Monoranjan Byapari has gone on length to explain why then another autobiography. No doubt, he has answered the questions to perfection. But, the fact that he himself raised the question before anyone of us asking, points to a few noteworthy aspects of his world, of his life. Through this autobiography, the researcher will try to bring forward and focus on these aspects which the author's introduction plays with.

Surviving in My World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal (2015) is an autobiography by Manohar Mouli Biswas originally written as *Amar Bhubane Ami BancheThaki* (2013) which was translated by Angana Dutta and Jaydeep Sarangi, unfolds an arduous venture to excavate childhood remembrances, seeks to recover them from the bottom of his memory. This book is a powerful exposure of the life of Dalits in Bengal before and after the 1947 Partition. Fragments of childhood memories narrate the lot of the caste-ridden community of Namashudra, living in a marginal small village in East Bengal. Despised as 'pork-eating Namas', his community was classified as a lower untouchable caste and shunned by the upper class 'bhadralok', who would not enter their neighbourhood nor did they sit and eat together with them. With much dignity and demureness, he narrates excruciating episodes of a remote past at a remote place. A persistent feeling of pain permeates this autobiography as the writer revisits the traumatic events that marked his childhood. Focusing on the caste system, which transformed his community into a massive heap of garbage at the bottom, declares that this social and cultural trauma still haunts him in many forms. The autobiography ends with recollecting a personal trauma also related to caste where he narrates the episode in which the mother of Rushita, the girl he used to love, explained the impossibility of their marriage because of their caste difference, remains deeply encrusted in his memory.

The third autobiography to focus on is of Adhir Biswas's much anticipated book *Memories of Arrival: A Voice of the Margins* translated by V. Ramaswamy and jointly published by Sage Publications and Stree-Samya Books which took place on 23rd February 2022. In 1967, a helpless, poor, twelve-year-old boy, Adhir Biswas left with the surviving members of his family from Magura, Jessore district (East Pakistan) for present day Kolkata and grows up to become the chief editor of the renowned Bengali publishing house, 'Gangchil'. It captures the politically turbulent times of the nineteen-sixties in Calcutta (Kolkata) during the upsurge of the Naxalite movement and the growing crisis of food resources. He narrates about being the person who had always been outcasted from the society, people's houses, places of worships and ceremonies for his financial status, caste and appearance. His subject of writing has always been about what he sees around him, of himself and his family. He has presented himself as someone who has been acquainted with Bengali culture and language much later in life. He reads caste in the text differently than an Indian reader, in a more global context of dislocation of the refugees and marginalised people across the world.

'Bachao, bachao...' thus begins Bengali Dalit writer Jatin Bala's autobiography *Shikor Chhenra Jibon* (2010) *or My Uprooted Life*. The first volume of the book is now being translated into English — a Sahitya Akademi initiative. Bala was born in 1949 in Jessore, now in Bangladesh. There was communal tension everywhere. He lost his mother when he was a little over a year old and his father died when he was barely four. He was brought up by his eldest brother, who was older to him by 25 years. Jatin Bala narrates how his father had to leave their family home and shift to another village as he was suspected to be an Indian spy because of his eldest brother's connection with the extremist Rajat Biswas, a close associate of

freedom fighter Bagha Jatin. Bala's father died soon after.He recalls an evening sometime in 1953-54, when their village was attacked and houses were set ablaze. He, his siblings and his paternal aunt, along with many others in the village, fled and hid amongst the thickets beyond. He narrates that the next morning they reached a Hindu-majority village called Boro Bondortala. The siblings finally crossed the border, reached Petrapole on the Indian side, and from there they walked all the way to the Bongaon railway station in West Bengal. From there they were eventually taken to Sealdah.

Jatin Bala came out of the camp and into a regular life when he was in his teens. The period between then and now he narrates with a single word "Ei". He stares out of the window and laments how people were dumped into those inhuman confinements who were powerless, abandoned — sans homes, sans land, sans a country to call their own.

Born on 19thApril, 1953 in a small village called Ramnagar, in Dhaka district of East Bengal, present day Bangladesh, Raju Das, is a lesser known name in the field of Dalit writing in Bengal. Not much moved with his insignificant space in Dalit writing, Raju Das' only aim is to make an inspirational contribution to the masses in both urban and rural Bengal, through his writings and performances of his plays as street theatre. In his autobiography, *Ek Rickshawalar Atmakotha* (2015), he narrates how he transformed his life from a richshaw-puller and successfully made his identity as a play writer.

The autobiography *Ami Keno Charal Likhi* (2016) by Kalyani Thakur Charal reflects a transition from the faith that with the erasure of caste, the condition of Dalit women would improve automatically to the realisation that centralisation of caste in Dalit movements, results in the suppression of issues concerning Dalit women. The trajectory of Kalyani's life from poverty, deprivation and caste discrimination to finding an identity and voice, is a human story of struggle and resilience. In some ways, it traces the journey of a Dalit woman in Bengal who braved the stigma of caste to liberate herself largely through education. Every step that she took was in search for an identity and every word that she wrote was an assertion of that. Running through her writing is this self-reflexive strain that is transformed naturally into a form of Dalit activism. In a sense, her voice is that of the women in her community

Another very significant Bengali Dalit writer is Nirmal Gayen whose autobiography is named *Langol Kolom* (2021). He was also born in today's Bangladesh and later migrated to India along with his family. He also represents his Namashudra community in his book. In his later life, he actively participated in Marichjhanpi Movement. So, in his writing, we get a vivid description of the trauma, struggle and plight of the people of Marichjhanpi,

Autobiographies are part of a literary genre that brings personal accounts of life in public domain. They incite others too to relate with their human emotions and circumstances with lived-up reality of the autobiographer. Autobiographies serve different purposes in different times and if autobiographies of Dalit writers are called as narrative of pain, it definitely carries certain historical truth.

Dalit writing draws its ideological strength from Ambedkar′s struggle and their basic philosophy is that the true picture of a Dalit′s pain and anguish can only be captured by a Dalit. Which is why, writers have taken to writing autobiographies for they see it as the most potent weapon. Therefore, unlike other fictional writings, autobiographies have flourished most among the Dalits.

TENTATIVE SCHEME OF CHAPTERISATION:

The present study will be divided into five chapters for the purpose of convenience as indicated below:

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The first chapter will deal with the divisive nature of the Indian society, its social evils including untouchability and the caste system in India. It will also dwell on the origin of the caste system, untouchability, the present status of the Dalit community in India in addition to different definitions of "caste", along with those of the terms "Dalit" and "Dalit Literature." It will give a detailed account of the background of the Dalit movement and the role of Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideology and inspiration in the emergence of the Dalit Literature.

CHAPTER TWO: ANALYSIS OF BENGALI DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: QUEST FROM IDENTITY TO SOCIAL EQUALITY

The second chapter will discuss autobiography as a genre, determining its place in Dalit literature and enumerating the distinctive features of Dalit autobiographies. It will also attempt to analyse the distinctive features of Bengali Dalit Literature where most of the writers are refugees due to Partition of Bengal at the time of Independence in 1947. The pains, suffering, agony of the Dalit life, the life which is full of humiliation, exploitation, oppression, suppression, brutality, ignorance and illiteracy shall be analysed with reference to two autobiographies, *Interrogating Chandal Life* and *Ek Rikshawalar Atmakotha* by Benali Dalits Manoranjan Byapari and Raju Das respectively. Despite their suffering at the hands of the brutal forces of caste, class and religion, the autobiographies will try to bring forth a positive attitude towards life. In a sense, these autobiographies will represent their search for the values of life such as democracy, socialism and secularism.

The chapter shall also focus on the impact of Partition of Bengal. As one of the biggest events in the history of the 20th century, what Partition meant and means for the innumerable victims whose lives were drawn willingly or unwillingly into its maelstrom is a theme that has commanded the attention of several generations of scholars, artists and literati. Arguably one of the central insights emerging from this vast corpus of reflection is just how multifaceted was the human experience of this watershed in the South Asian past.

Defying uniformity, Partition was triumph and tragedy; loss, displacement, unlikely accommodation and recovery; enabling of unexpected agency; rebirth and reconciliation; terror and horror; trauma and relief, seemingly, all at once. In collective imagination however, the event remains framed as the political consequence of communalism; the religious community – whether Hindu or Muslim– as the source of irreconcilable difference. While there is no denying the self-evidence of this proposition, what the ineluctable logic of communalism obscures are the stark variations between how groupings supposedly within the religious community endured the burden of the event which were indeed significant. Partition, in short, did not deliver the promised homeland to all.

This is perhaps especially the case with the Dalits of late-colonial Bengal. One of the largest (scheduled) castes of the province, the leaders of this labouring and agricultural community

sought to effectively challenge the caste Hindu domination of public life through their negotiations with the colonial state over the course of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Like the Mahars of Bombay presidency, they took the lead in Dalit movements to secure social justice, respectability and equality, and actively pursued the opportunities to be gained from articulating critiques of anti-colonial nationalism coupled with a deep-seated loyalism towards their colonial interlocutors. Situated predominantly in the eastern districts of Bengal, a historical accident that would have lasting implications for their postcolonial existence, Dalits combined with Muslims to seriously undermine the kinds of privileges caste Hindus had grown accustomed to enjoying. They kept aloof from nationalist mobilisations and over the course of provincial autonomy, responded favourably to B.R. Ambedkar's call for Dalit self-determination.

It has indeed been a "long partition" for the Dalits of eastern India. Even today, the shadow of that divide touches the lives of those who are yet to be granted citizenship under suspicion of being illegal migrants from Bangladesh or the deeds to the small parcels of land they acquired through their own initiative. And they have of course also contended with that other great partition in their everyday lives – that of casteism, its unrelenting prejudices and exclusions. That they have endured such insurmountable circumstances is a tribute to the resilience of the human being.

CHAPTER THREE: THE VOICE OF THE MARGINALISED: INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

In recent years, autobiographies written by Dalit intellectuals, have provided the reader with rare inner views of their lived experiences, which are otherwise not accessible to outsiders trying to enter that world through either conventional archive. Over a last few years, a number of Dalit autobiographies have been published in Hindi, Kannada, Marathi and a few of them have been translated into English. As for Bengali, it is only recently that the publication of a few autobiographies by Dalit intellectuals have been published, providing the readers with a rare glimpse into the lives and experiences of the Dalits in Bengal and more importantly, giving the world a clear idea of how caste discrimination worked or still works in this linguistic region. This study will thus try to explode that popular 'bhadralok' myth that caste does not matter in Bengal.

Dalit autobiographies are helpful to understand the sufferings inflicted on human beings by the fellow human beings under the age-old social system of exploitation of man by man. These sufferings and exploitation are depicted in the form of confession in autobiographies. The motive of such confession is to get the whole Dalit community aware of their social, cultural and economic exploitation and to inform the non-Dalits about their way of protest. So, confession of sufferings and multiple exploitations is one of the prominent features of Dalit autobiographies through which a strong opposition has been registered against untouchability, humiliation, sufferings and pitiable condition caused by a biased social structure.

The Dalit personal narratives juxtapose marginalized position of the individual self and community as well. They are marginalised with physical segregation in terms of their habitation both in villages and towns as well that is found in all the select set of autobiographies. Dalits are marginalized in all spheres of social, cultural, educational, professional, political and intellectual activities which is systematized through upper-caste cultural hegemony.

The autobiographies by Manohar Mouli Biswas and Adhir Biswas describe their trauma of caste violence and challenge the in-built paradigm of Dalit marginalisation which has been theorised through the mainstream scriptural narratives. Their autonarratives depict how the Namashudra peasant families in remote villages of the then East Pakistan lived their daily lives, experienced material deprivation and caste discrimination, participated in their quotidian religious lives that defied establishment boundaries of organized religion, aspired for the achieved limited social mobility, responded to the outside world of colonial modernity, rejected mainstream nationalism and were unsettled and displaced by Partition. While they always were locked at the wrong end of the power equation, there was no lack of agency, as they struggle against adversity, enjoyed the simple pleasures of life and tried to shape their own futures.

The narratives of untouchability expose that the Dalit marginality more or less remain camouflaged in the upper-caste psyche which is inherent in the caste system. The Dalit autobiographers through their act of writing autobiography reconstruct their history. The narratives also present insights into the future of the liberation of the subjugated. Having consciously associated with individual life with that of the community, the autobiographers provide the readers an opportunity to consider their roles in the formation of Dalit struggle for their emancipation.

CHAPTER FOUR: AESTHETICS AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN BENGALI DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Jatin Bala, Nirmal Gayen and Kalyani Thakur Charal in their autobiographies, *Shikor Chenra Jibon, Langol Kalam* and *Ami Keno Charal Likhi* -write from an ideological position that is directly influenced by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and informed by the Marathi and Kannada Dalit writings as well as by the radical Afro-American literature. According to them, only those who are born in Dalit conditions can properly understand and appreciate Dalit aesthetics, because the lived experiences of the Dalits are so different from those of the upper-caste Hindus. Through their auto-narratives, they bring out the various aspects of that hierarchical power relations in mid-twentieth century rural Bengal. They instil this structural dichotomy into the language structure of their narratives. While their main story is written in chaste literary Bengali, sometimes the conversations between family members or other Namashudra villagers is rendered in colloquial East-Bengali dialect as an authentic marker of their subalternity. This also makes their book difficult to translate as the vocabulary of this Namashudra was so far removed from the lexicon of the English -speaking 'Bengali bhadralok elite'. But the translators have done a commendable job by maintaining that linguistic dichotomy in their translation, as far as possible. Not only for non-Bengali readers, their autobiographies will also provide a glimpse of the Dalit life experiences in Bengal; hopefully, this research will also shake the Bengali "bhadralok" out of their persistent sense of denial about the existence of caste prejudices in their own community.

Social content and aesthetic form are inseparable in any literary work. The autonomy of a literary work as a work of literature should be granted, however, when a theme of social awareness is presented in a proper literary form, it assumes significance. Dalit literature remarkably comprises a considerable amount of the themes of social awareness. Though, in literary criticism, it seems that the content-oriented and form-oriented positions are separate, in actual criticism they go hand in hand. Social and formal aspects are blended in a literary work and such blending is organic otherwise both the purposes are susceptible to defeat.

The Ambedkarite thought and the articulation of life-affirming values in the works of Dalit writers speak for the liberation of the Dalits from their wretchedness. The value of a literary work depends on how much and in what way an artist's ideas imbedded in the work can affect the reader.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The last chapter will be in the form of conclusion in which the findings are enumerated in terms of observations and inferences. It is observed that the Bengali Dalit literature seeks to explore into its own aesthetics of literature and opens up an ever-expanding world of Dalitness- Dalit sensibility and Dalit consciousness. The perception is basically a perception of eternal human suffering and existentialist predicament. Therefore, Dalit literature is not just a literature of marginality, it is also a part of world literature of "protest" and "revolt".

The current study will make an attempt to look at the issues relating to the Dalit identity, history, politics and aesthetics through a select set of autobiographies. The area would require fresh engagement for further exploration of the Dalit questions by taking into account the ever-proliferating literary texts that have made a distinctive mark not only as an emerging literary movement in India but also drawing global critical attention as a significant new literature emerging from the margin

Indian literature is being turned upside down with the subaltern speaking and it is vital to capture this phenomenon via English translation as opined by Mr. Ramaswamy. He commented on the importance of Dalit refugee narratives in partition literature which is usually dominated by tropes of educated, high caste refugees who manage to rise in every way in the post partition era. In translating Biswas's books, Ramaswamy talked of how he wanted to "address and redress this unbridgeable divide" of class and caste experiences. He pointed out that one needs to be familiar with Bengali culture and history to some extent to understand the text. Retaining the voice and style of the original while making it comprehensible for the non-embedded reader, had been a challenge for the translators of these autobiographies.

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